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SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR: INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT BEGINS

11. (SBU) Summary: The implementation of the transition charter agreed to in Maputo by Madagascar's four main political rivals has begun. The leadership of a new power-sharing transition government has been installed, including a consensus prime minister, president of congress, the transition president, two co-presidents, and the president of the national reconciliation council (CNR). According to the co-presidency, the full cabinet is to be announced Nov 21, with the national reconciliation council and legislature following on Nov 23 and 25, respectively. Elections evaluation teams from the UN and other entities have arrived, and the "P-5" ambassadors have begun making courtesy calls on the transition officials to show the international community's support for the unity government. AGOA eligibility, which has received extensive media coverage this week, continues to be the main leverage point for pressing for rapid progress toward a return to constitutional rule, not only used by the USG, but others in the international community. Additional leverage comes from the threat of EU sanctions under the Cotonou Article 96 process, which will almost certainly be avoided if the new government and an elections roadmap are settled quickly. End Summary.

Progress towards Constitutional Rule

12. (SBU) The transition charter agreed to in Maputo in August has begun being implemented. Long, hard negotiations are beginning to show real results. On Nov 13, consensus Prime Minister Eugene Mangalaza took the reigns from de facto PM Monja Roindefo in a ceremony attended by the local diplomatic corps. The new PM told the Ambassador on Nov 18 that he has already begun to work, including meeting with the secretaries general of key ministries to ensure continuity and shoring up his own office after Monja's disastrous tenure. He is in charge of consultations with the four political movements to finalize the government and has been in frequent contact with the president, co-presidents, and movement leaders for that end. Former President Zafy, now the president of the national reconciliation council (CRN, also created by Maputo), also contacted the other three movements this week to request the names of their representatives to the CRN. President of Congress Mamy Rakotoarivelo has been installed and is working to launch the congress. He explained to the Ambassador that the Ravalomanana movement has already chosen its 52 members, but that other movements are waiting until the government is finalized before naming to the congress those who didn't "make the first cut."

13. (SBU) UN, Indian Ocean Commission (COI), and the International Francophony Organization (OIF) elections evaluation teams arrived the week of Nov 16 to begin their assessments. Transition President Rajoelina convoked a presidential council meeting on Nov 18 with the

two co-presidents and the prime minister. Following the three-hour meeting, Rajoelina declared on public television that the members of the consensus cabinet would be announced Nov 21, the national reconciliation commission would be set up Nov 23, and the congress and senate would be installed Nov 25. Rajoelina has reportedly called another presidential council meeting for Nov 19 to discuss coordination procedures and follow-up on the status of cabinet formation.

International Engagement

14. (SBU) The international community, including the U.S., has begun publicly engaging with the new transition leaders to show support for the unity government. The French ambassador formally presented his credentials to transition President Rajoelina Nov 10; he was the only resident ambassador not having presented credentials. The diplomatic corps attended the ceremony in which the former PM passed power to the new consensus PM on Nov 13. The same day, the diplomatic corps issued a communique applauding the progress to date, but encouraging the full, prompt implementation of the Maputo and Addis agreements. The week of Nov 16, the French, Chinese, Russian, and US Ambassadors paid courtesy calls on the new co-presidents, the head of congress, and the consensus prime minister to demonstrate international community support for the new power-sharing government.

15. (SBU) During the Ambassador's meetings this week with Transition President Rajoelina's chief of staff, Co-President Rakotovahiny, Prime Minister Mangalaza, and Congress President Rakotoarivelo, he urged them to embrace their new responsibilities and work promptly towards the full implementation of the transition charter, leading

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to elections by November 2010, as called for in Maputo. He noted the urgency of concrete implementation measures, particularly as Madagascar's eligibility for African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) trade benefits are under discussion in Washington. His interlocutors, already well-informed of the stakes involved in the AGOA decision, said they were working towards full implementation of the charter but that negotiations over the division of ministries were complicated by historical animosities, allegations of corruption, ethnic/regional considerations, and electoral ambitions. Despite these obstacles, they had reached agreement on all but three out of 28 posts. They understood the urgency to resolve the remaining disagreements. The French Ambassador also made the same points on AGOA in calls on Transition President Rajoelina and others. (The U.S. ambassador has not yet called publicly on Rajoelina; septel will address this and other related issues.)

Elections Timetable

16. (SBU) The Ambassador also encouraged Rajoelina's foreign minister and former President Zafy to work towards rapid implementation of the Maputo charter during meetings this week. Zafy confirmed to the Ambassador his intention to finalize the election commission (CENI) in December. As president of the national reconciliation council, Zafy is in charge of establishing the CENI, for which he said the implementing texts have already been prepared. Zafy added that he envisages the following rough electoral calendar (conforming to the Maputo charter deadline of November 2010): national conference and standing-up of CENI in December 2009; constitutional referendum in April; presidential and legislative elections in the Sept-Oct timeframe. Although Zafy and others had previously pushed an earlier timetable, the UN elections assessment team leader favors this less rushed version as it will more realistically accommodate the multitude of steps required before holding credible elections.

AGOA in the Press

17. (SBU) AGOA has been in the press here since April, but it has become a focal point of discussion as the deadline has drawn near. Following meetings with the president of the transition congress and the consensus prime minister Nov 17 and 18, the Ambassador was interviewed by the local press and explained that the AGOA decision is underway and that the Malagasy leaders must act now to show further progress. Television and newspaper coverage has been

extensive. Politicians and the public alike are informed of the timetable for the AGOA decision and are watching carefully.

International Community Stance

18. (SBU) The local international contact group met at the South African Embassy Nov 18 to discuss the current political situation. The group agreed to give the transition leaders a few more days to install the full cabinet before issuing a communique to encourage such action and possibly call for the international mediators to return to Madagascar. The group further agreed that it would be best for the Malagasy to settle the remaining issues regarding the cabinet internally if possible. The German Ambassador, representing the Swedish EU Presidency that ends on December 31, called for a new government "by the end of the week" in order to satisfy the urgent EU Presidency call for a new round of formal political dialogue with Madagascar.

19. (SBU) Contacts from the European Union explained separately to Emboff that the EU will likely opt for a "benchmark" approach similar to that proposed by State for the AGOA discussions, including implementation of the government, setting up of the independent electoral commission, and the setting of a firm elections timetable. The EU froze around Euros 630 million of aid last March, but will likely turn on programs progressively as each of these benchmarks are met. As long as the transition is continuing to make progress, the EU is unlikely to impose new sanctions or cut any of the frozen aid programs, but will continue to encourage the move towards elections. The African Union has declared that it plans to reinstate Madagascar once the cabinet is in place and a roadmap is established for holding elections. On Nov 17, the UN Security Council welcomed the power-sharing agreement, noted that the UN elections team was deployed already, and called for formation of the transition government as soon as possible.

Comment

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10. (SBU) The USG will be sharply out of step with the UN, SADC, AU, EU, and the French if we undermine a painstaking process that we too have been supporting for months just as it is finally showing results. Suspension of AGOA benefits at this time would make us an outlier among the international community and would severely damage our future bilateral relationship with Madagascar. (A timely reminder of the usefulness of that relationship will come today when Madagascar votes in favor of the Human Rights Resolution on Iran, the USG's top human rights objective at this year's UNGA.) Furthermore, the widespread suffering and economic dislocation that would result from AGOA suspension would undermine, rather than support, ongoing efforts to return Madagascar to constitutional rule. End comment.

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